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ABSTRACT

This article examines how novice teachers in Japan and in the United States, specifically in the state of Ohio, are assessed, evaluated, and supported as they enter the teaching profession. Comparison of practices and tools which characterize the two countries' approaches toward assessment and mentoring reveals that important differences exist in both the competencies assessed for entry into the teaching profession and the induction experiences of new teachers. An emphasis on performance assessment in Ohio is based on the expectation that teachers will demonstrate disciplinary competence and pedagogical skills prior to being granted professional licensure. In contrast, the emphasis on mentoring and professional development during the induction year in Japan reflects a belief that learning to teach takes place gradually within a professional community. (Contains 11 references.) (Author/SM)

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# Measuring What Matters; Assessing Novice Teachers in Ohio and Japan

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Measuring What Matters: Assessing NoviceTeachers in Ohio and Japan

Abstract:

This article examines how novice teachers in Japan and in the United States, specifically in the state of Ohio, are assessed, evaluated, and supported as they enter the teaching profession. Comparison of practices and tools which characterize the two countries' approaches toward assessment and mentoring reveals that important differences exist in both the competencies assessed for entry into the teaching profession and the induction experiences of new teachers. An emphasis on performance assessment in Ohio is based on the expectation that teachers will demonstrate disciplinary competence and pedagogical skills prior to being granted professional licensure. In contrast, the emphasis on mentoring and professional development during the induction year in Japan reflects a belief that learning to teach takes place gradually within a professional community.

**Measuring What Matters: Assessing Novice Teachers in Ohio and Japan**

A central issue in public conversation about school reform in the United States has been the question of teachers' competency (Darling-Hammond, 1990). How can we ensure that those who enter the teaching profession possess the knowledge and skills which will result in learning for every child? Shimahara and Sakai (1995) have reported that a similar concern has been an important focus of educational reform in Japan, especially since the late 1960s. However, attempts to develop and assess desired teacher competencies vary greatly among countries and must be considered in the light of the culturally situated nature of teaching and learning (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Tsuneyoshi, 2001). Approaches to evaluation reflect different assumptions about what is important for teachers to know and to be able to do, when and how professional knowledge and skills are to be acquired, and how such knowledge and skills can be assessed and evaluated. Examination of how novice teachers in Japan and the United States are assessed, evaluated, and supported as they enter the teaching profession reveals that important differences in these assumptions help to shape both the competencies assessed for entry into the teaching profession and the induction experiences of new teachers.

Evaluation of teachers' performance has become both a professional and a political issue recently in the United States (No Child Left Behind Act , 2002). In Ohio, one response to the heightened concerns about teacher competence has been to mandate performance assessments for all teachers during their first year of employment. In addition, teacher education programs in all of the state's higher education institutions are now monitored to ensure that graduates who complete their programs achieve passing scores on a variety of assessment tools. Institutions whose graduates do not achieve an acceptable rate of success may face loss of state accreditation. Such assessments present high stakes for both individual teacher candidates and the colleges and universities which educate them.

As a teacher educator in a small liberal arts college in Ohio, I have watched my students as they struggle to develop teaching competencies and to demonstrate these skills in public school classrooms. I am also keenly aware of their anxieties about the anticipated performance assessments which will make their first year of teaching even more stressful than it would otherwise be. Both students and faculty feel the need to insure that graduates leave the teacher education program armed with the full repertoire of the skills and knowledge they will need as a teacher. Although some efforts are now being made to support and mentor new teachers as they enter the profession, once teachers are employed, they are largely on their own in terms of applying their skills and increasing their professional knowledge. It seems to me that it would be helpful to look more closely at the larger system of teacher assessment, professional

development and support for new teachers, and to reexamine the assumptions we make about how and when to evaluate the competencies of novice teachers. Looking at practices in educational systems that are different from those we are familiar with may enable us to look more critically at previously taken-for-granted features of our own systems (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995).

A recent opportunity for study in Sapporo, Japan, provided opportunities for observations in several Japanese schools and higher education institutions and many conversations with teachers, principals, and teacher educators. An attempt was made to observe a range of educational levels at a variety of educational sites. These observations and conversations have led to reflections comparing Japanese and American approaches to educating teachers and assessing teacher performance. Two benefits of such reflections have been my increased awareness of alternative approaches to ensuring beginning teacher competency and a more critical look at my previous assumptions about how and when people learn to teach.

The goals of this article are 1) to compare and contrast practices and tools used to evaluate novice teachers in Ohio and in Japan, and 2) to explore differences and similarities in Japanese and American approaches to developing and evaluating teachers' professional competencies. It is hoped that sharing different ways of responding to common concerns will help to reexamine previous assumptions and facilitate consideration of alternative approaches to teacher education.

**Assessments Linked to Teacher Licensure and Hiring**

Ohio's Praxis Examinations

There has been a long-standing debate in the United States about how to assess what teachers need to know in order to help students learn. Opinions vary concerning the relative importance of disciplinary content knowledge, pedagogical skills, knowledge of the learner and the learning process, and the practical knowledge gained from teaching experience. In both Japan and the United States prospective teachers must pass tests of professional and disciplinary knowledge, but these tests vary in terms of their content and when they are administered. Teacher licensure in Ohio is contingent upon earning a passing score on selected standardized tests developed by Educational Testing Service. The Praxis II test series (Educational Testing Service, 1994) includes items drawn from all the above-mentioned knowledge bases. All students take tests of their content knowledge based on learned society standards in specific disciplines and grade levels for which they are earning licenses. They also take a separate test which evaluates their knowledge of teaching strategies, learning theories, and practical knowledge of classroom management. Many questions ask students to make appropriate professional decisions based on brief case studies of hypothetical classroom situations. Passing scores are established by the state licensing authorities. The tests are administered near the end of the teacher education program before the institution recommends candidates for licensure. It is entirely possible that students may complete all the courses and requirements for the teacher education program and still fail the licensure examinations.

However, the expectation is that, if the college or university program has done its job, a high percentage of candidates will eventually achieve a passing score.

Prefectural Examinations in Japan

In Japan a teacher is licensed by a prefectural board of education when he or she graduates from an approved teacher education program, having completed a student teaching experience. Examinations given by each prefecture measure knowledge and skills; these are directly linked to teacher employment rather than to licensure. Teachers are usually employed by the prefecture, rather than by local school boards, although several large cities, called ordinance-designated cities, do hire new teachers. In order to be employed, would-be teachers must take a prefectural examination. Each prefecture creates its own examinations, and so these examinations differ from prefecture to prefecture. For example, Hokkaido asks future elementary school teachers to be able to swim 25 meters and to dribble a basketball through a course moving through several poles. Other prefectures may test different athletic skills such as vaulting over a horse (H. Usui, personal communication, August 10, 2002).

Strictly speaking, students do not pass or fail these tests. Rather, students' scores on the prefectural examinations are ranked, and starting with the highest score, the prefecture hires the best candidates until all available jobs are filled. The examinations are highly competitive because the number of students taking the tests is far in excess of the number of jobs available. Ohio tests set minimum

standards for teacher competency, but Japanese hiring exams enable selective hiring of the most able teachers.

In contrast to Ohio where almost all prospective teachers are expected to pass the licensure examinations, the prefectural examinations in Japan are extremely competitive. At Sapporo University in Hokkaido, for example, at an orientation for students entering the teacher education program, it was announced that only about ten percent of the teacher education graduates actually will be employed as teachers. This overall licensure to hiring ratio was verified by teacher educators at several other universities in Hokkaido prefecture . In some content areas, it is even more competitive. For example, at one university, I was informed that of the 17 graduates of the teacher education program in English in the previous year, only one was now employed as a teacher (T. Grose & D. Hinkelman, personal communication, April 26, 2002).

The speaker at the Sapporo University orientation session stressed that, given such competition, the person entering teaching must have a seriousness of purpose in choosing this profession. Students were warned that completing a teacher education program will require more study than is needed by the average student getting a bachelor's degree and will require more courses. Becoming a teacher, moreover, involves much more than just completing the teacher education program requirements. In addition, students will have to pass the prefectural examinations. Students also enhance their employability by participating in college extra-curricular experiences. This is because Japanese teachers are expected to provide guidance to students through club activities.

Therefore, the chance for employment is enhanced when applications have skills in special areas such as sports, computers, music, or foreign languages.

Why, I asked, did so many students continue to pursue teacher licensure, even though it required great effort and the employment statistics were so discouraging? Professors and public school teachers gave several reasons that teaching remains a popular career goal. The first reason is job security. Once hired, the teacher can expect to be assigned to various schools within the prefecture throughout his or her career. Remembering my own first years of teaching, I asked about observations and performance evaluations, continuing education requirements for renewing licenses, and other practices which can make new teachers in Ohio feel as if they are constantly at risk of losing their jobs. These practices do not exist in Japanese schools. There is currently some talk of requiring principals' evaluations, but this does not usually occur. The emphasis appears to be on mentoring new teachers, not on assessing their competence. The other major reasons students continue to choose teaching is that the salary is good relative to other professions and status is high compared to other jobs in Japan (T. Grose & D. Hinkelman, personal communication, April 26, 2002). One cannot but compare this to the situation in the United States where status and pay do not compare favorably with other professions and where the first few years of teaching are stressful, characterized by lack of mentoring and almost constant evaluation. Finally, some teachers mentioned that opportunities for temporary paid leave from teaching—twenty days in the first year—along with

generous policies regarding maternity leave made teaching an even more attractive career (Y. Ishi, personal communication, Aug. 25, 2002).

Comparing the Content of Teacher Assessments in Japan and Ohio

A look at the assessments used in Japan and in the United States reveals some differences in terms of what knowledge is deemed most valuable for teachers in each country. The teacher hiring examinations for elementary school teachers in Japan include seven components: 1) fundamental knowledge of education which includes history and philosophy of education and educational psychology; 2) general information in the fields of humanities, social science, and natural science; 3) specific subject content knowledge; 4) essay writing; 5) individual and group interviews and teaching of a mock class lesson; 6) performances such as playing the piano, singing, swimming, or dribbling a basketball; and 7) aptitude tests and personality tests ( Usui, 1998). In Ohio teachers must also pass a test of content knowledge in the specific disciplines in which they are seeking licensure, and a second test on knowledge of teaching and learning which includes questions based on scenarios describing hypothetical classroom situations. Two important differences can be noted. Whereas, in Japan the hiring examinations are closely tied to the schools' required course of study, the tests in Ohio are based on disciplinary knowledge drawn from learned society standards that may differ widely from the actual course of study that is used in K-12 public schools. Second, the emphasis on

teaching strategies and case studies in the Ohio tests reflects a belief in the crucial nature of pedagogical content knowledge.

Teacher Performance Assessment in Ohio

Many kinds of written tests have been used to measure teachers' knowledge, but questions remain about how to evaluate individuals' ability to apply this knowledge and to demonstrate pedagogical skills in real classrooms. Does passing a written test mean that a person will be a good teacher? Reflecting the concern that teachers may not be able to transfer theoretical knowledge demonstrated on tests to real teaching practice, there has been a search for more authentic measures of teacher competence.

Ohio is one of several states which have made teacher performance assessments a central feature of new teacher licensing policies (Ohio State Department of Education, 1996). Ohio selected as its framework PRAXIS III: Classroom Performance Assessments, developed by the Educational Testing Service. The criteria that make up the assessment framework are based on aspects of teachers' responsibilities that have been identified through empirical studies and theoretical research as factors which improve students' learning (Danielson, 1996). After 2002, teachers in Ohio will be required during their induction year to demonstrate competency through PRAXIS III performance assessments in order to receive an initial teaching license.

When prospective teachers complete a state-approved teacher education program at a higher education institution and earn a passing score on the Praxis II examinations, the college or university recommends that they be granted a conditional teaching license for two years. This temporary license enables the would-be teacher to gain employment in any local school district to which they might apply. During the first year of employment, a trained Praxis III Assessor will observe and evaluate the teacher's teaching performance and a variety of professional dispositions such as planning, reflection, and collaboration with colleagues. If the first year's evaluation does not indicate that the teacher's performance is adequate, then further observations and evaluations are carried out during the second year. If, after the second year of employment, the teacher has still not demonstrated satisfactory performance through Praxis III assessments, the temporary license will not be renewed. At this point, the local school district must terminate the teacher's employment, and the teacher must undertake some kind of remedial study at a teacher education institution before the institution will again recommend the applicant for a temporary license.

As one might imagine, undergoing such a rigorous assessment process can add a great deal of stress for a first year teacher who is already enduring the stress of beginning a new job. In order to assist and support the entry year teachers, the state also mandated that each new teacher be assigned a mentor teacher within the district. Mentors are regular classroom teachers who have been selected by their school administrations and paired with newly hired teachers who have less than two years of teaching experience. Originally begun

as an informal way of orienting new teachers to the cultures of local school systems, mentoring has begun to be seen as a more systematic means of professional development.

As a tool for the mentoring process, the Educational Testing Service developed a formative assessment system called Pathwise, which employed the same criteria as the summative Praxis assessments. Mentors are intended to familiarize the new teachers with the Praxis/Pathwise criteria and provide coaching and support throughout the assessment process. Because the Praxis Performance-Based Assessments have just been implemented, few practicing teachers were at all familiar with the language or performance criteria associated with them. Therefore, intensive efforts are being made to train mentors in local school districts to understand and apply the Praxis/Pathwise criteria so that they can better assist the new teachers whose licensure will be determined by these evaluations. While the system is new, mentoring may appear very different from school district to school district, and many issues are emerging regarding the practical aspects of providing mentoring. These issues include such questions as who provides the funds needed for mentor training, how mentor teachers can be released from teaching duties while they mentor others, and what structures best facilitate mentoring within the school building and the local district. At present, mentoring exists on a very informal and idiosyncratic basis in most districts. It is not usually associated with systematic professional development for novice teachers.

**Evaluation of Preservice Teachers**

Implications of Performance-Based Assessment for Preservice Teachers

The implementation of a criterion-referenced and performance-based system of teacher evaluation has important implications that affect both teachers' preservice education and the kinds of professional development needed during the induction year. In Ohio this has required teacher education institutions to align the curriculums of their preservice programs with the criteria which will be evaluated for licensure and to familiarize preservice teachers with the specialized language of the new assessments. Because the state will evaluate teacher education programs on the basis of the percentage of graduates who pass all assessments, there is increasing concern about establishing preliminary assessments which will predict student success or failure.

Ohio's emphasis on performance-based assessment has given increased importance to the evaluation of preservice teachers in field and clinical experiences. Pathwise/Praxis performance criteria must be taught in on-campus teaching methods classes, and these criteria are incorporated into the forms which are used to evaluate students during field experiences, which almost always accompany teaching methods classes. Field experience assessment responsibilities are usually divided between supervising public school teachers and college faculty who agree to make the Pathwise Observation Sequence part of their supervision.

During the final practicum, a college supervisor usually visits and evaluates the student teacher weekly for a nine to twelve week period, and during this time

would also complete at least one Pathwise Observation Sequence with the preservice teachers so that they could begin to become familiar with the process. The intention is that through use of the performance based assessment system in field experiences students would more easily see how the criteria applied to actual teaching contexts and would be assisted in using these criteria to evaluate their own teaching performances. In addition, they would experience their supervising teachers modeling reflection on teaching using the professional language of the Pathwise criteria. They would become comfortable with the Pathwise Observation Process itself, and therefore, better prepared for later Praxis III observations.

Preservice Teacher Evaluation in Japan

Ohio's elaborate system of beginning teacher assessments indicates an assumption that when teachers graduate from a teacher education program, they should be fully prepared to take charge of a classroom and to function as independent professionals. In contrast, practices in Japan suggest a belief that teachers really best learn to teach on the job as they work with colleagues to improve teaching. Through professional development groups in schools, the classroom becomes "a laboratory for the development and testing of new teaching techniques" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

The knowledge that new teachers will continue to be supported as they learn to teach on the job may be one reason that many Japanese teacher education programs incorporate less field experience than do American programs. Hokkaido University of Education, which is one of eight universities in Japan

especially designated as teacher education institutions, requires a substantial amount of early field experience which looks very similar to what Ohio students experience. This includes observation in the university lab school during the first year, assisting in special education classrooms during the second year, a five-week practicum experience in the main area of certification during the third year, and, during the fourth year, another two-week practicum in the minor area of certification. Cooperating teachers and university faculty share supervisory responsibility (H. Usui, personal communication, April 13, 2002).

However, more than 70 other universities offer teacher training courses, while not being primarily denoted as teacher education universities. At these institutions the student teaching experience had just been increased from two weeks to four weeks for elementary and junior high school teachers in response to a change in the Educational Personnel Certification Law. The minimum length of student teaching experience for senior high school teachers continues to be two weeks , although changes have been proposed (Usui, 1998). Teacher educators I spoke with at two of these universities indicated that the public schools were opposed to lengthening student teaching because they believed it would interfere with the work of preparing junior and senior high students for examinations. Perhaps, in part, because of these exam pressures, student teachers in secondary schools do not assume full responsibility for the classroom as they would be expected to do in Ohio. The supervising classroom teacher is responsible for assessment, and the student teacher is probably only observed

one time by a college faculty member (T. Grose, D. Hinkelman, personal communication, April 26, 2002; T. Guerin, personal communication, May 3, 2002).

**Mentoring and Professional Development in Japan**

Conversations with principals and teacher educators revealed a consistent and intentional pattern of mentoring and professional development of entry year teachers in Japan. Each first year teacher is assigned a mentor, who is usually a retired teacher. The mentor is paid by the prefecture rather than by the local school district. This ensures that mentors' primary responsibility is to the new teachers they are assisting. New teachers receive a mandatory sixty days of in-house professional training during their first year and an additional thirty days of additional out-of-house professional development. This professional education is specifically tailored to meet the needs of teachers during their induction year. Substitute teachers are hired by the prefecture to cover the new teachers' own classrooms during training days.

Thirty of the ninety required training days are government-sponsored professional development provided by prefectures or the Ministry of Education at regional or city educational centers. A school principal who had, until recently, been Department Chair of Curriculum for the Sapporo Board of Education, explained to me that these government sponsored professional development opportunities, while valuable, were not always welcomed by the new teachers themselves. These educational programs are available to teachers as paid days

with transportation payments and stipends. However, teachers often complain about these sessions because they are "too general" and not tailored to teachers' specific needs (T. Takahashi, personal communication, April 23, 2002). This is a complaint frequently heard from teachers in the United States when they are required to attend district or state inservice education meetings.

Mr. Takahashi explained that the other sixty required days are provided "in house" by the faculty in the new teachers' own buildings. The school provides at least 20 days each year of professional in-service for all teachers. New teachers get at least 10 more. A significant part of the "in house" professional development takes the form of "the study of teaching" which means that teachers work collaboratively to develop, teach, and refine successful lessons. This kind of lesson study has been well described by Lewis & Tshuchida (1998 ), Stigler & Hiebert (1999), and others.

Japanese teachers are well-accustomed to viewing teaching as a semi-public and collaborative process. They study teaching together. When Japanese teachers collaboratively develop a research lesson and continue to refine it throughout the school year, the group takes responsibility for the success and improvement of the lesson. When one person teaches the research lesson, the focus for improvement is on the design of the lesson , not on the skill of the person who happens to be teaching it. (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Thus, Japanese teachers can perhaps be more comfortable than many of their United States counterparts would be about inviting novice teachers to observe their classrooms while they conduct demonstration lessons .

**Conclusion**

Comparison of teacher assessment tools and practices in Ohio with those in Japan reveal some different assumptions about what knowledge and skills are considered important for teachers in each system. Expectations also differ about when teachers are expected to have learned how to teach.

In Ohio, assessments reflect a belief in the importance of both academic content knowledge and pedagogical skills, although the emphasis on content knowledge is significantly greater for secondary school teachers than for early childhood teachers. However, a frequently heard criticism is that the content knowledge required is not necessarily related to the course of study teachers will be expected to teach to their students. In Japan, teacher assessments have typically stressed disciplinary knowledge much more than pedagogical knowledge. Japanese hiring examinations draw many factual items from the course of study required by the Ministry of Education.

The emphasis on performance assessment in Ohio reveals a growing concern that teaching competence depends on more than disciplinary mastery, and there is an expectation that this competence will be demonstrated prior to licensure. Thus, teachers' mastery of essential knowledge and skills is assessed during the first year of teaching. Although some informal mentoring is often provided, along with occasional school district professional development days, for the most part, individual teachers are responsible for seeking out and paying for

their own professional growth. In contrast, the emphasis on mentoring and professional development during the induction year in Japan reflects a belief that learning to teach takes place more gradually and in a community of other teachers. Mentoring is viewed as so important that the government hires professionals who make it their primary responsibility. The new teacher becomes part of a group of colleagues who expect to collaborate and assist each other to improve the quality of their teaching.

In the United States, teachers most often associate professional observation of their teaching with assessment and evaluation by school administrators. Hiring and retention decisions are often made based on these periodic observations of new teachers. The content and teaching methods used in the lesson, as well as the skill with which it is taught, are assumed to reflect the professional competence of the individual teacher. Furthermore, these competencies are being judged in the complicated context of classrooms where teaching is affected by many variables, including unpredictable student behaviors. Therefore, professional observation, has come to feel threatening to many teachers. To expose one's teaching performance to the eyes of others is to risk criticism or even, in some cases, loss of one's job. No wonder that teachers have traditionally gone into their classrooms and closed the door. However, the consequence of this isolation of the teaching act has been that new teachers do not have the advantage of seeing more experienced teachers modeling expert practice. This situation may be improving as awareness of the value of mentoring and collaboration grows, and teachers are provided with released time from their

classrooms to observe each other. Ohio's emphasis on mentoring during the entry year is an encouraging sign.

In general, conversations with Japanese teacher educators suggested that the induction year for Japanese teachers is viewed as a year for supportive mentoring and systematic professional development. It is assumed that learning to teach will take place gradually, and that teaching is a collaborative enterprise. In contrast, for American teachers the first year of teaching takes on a more probationary nature. The Ohio teacher will succeed or fail based on individual teaching performance, even though help is often received informally from other teachers. After the rigorous competition of the hiring examinations, the Japanese teacher is securely employed and is not subject to further assessment. The new Ohio teacher, on the other hand, is not tenured, and is subjected, not only to the PRAXIS III performance examinations, but is also usually evaluated by school administrators. It may be that the more competitive hiring examinations, coupled with the systematic mentoring and professional development built into the first year of teaching in Japan, create less need for assessments during the induction year. In any case, Japan may provide some examples of supportive practices that could make the entry year of teaching less stressful and help with teacher retention.

Recent trends indicate that changes are occurring in both systems. For example, practices such as increasing the length of student teaching in Japan may facilitate a move toward more performance based assessment, while raising passing scores on written exams in Ohio will place more emphasis on mastery of

disciplinary content. New regulations already being implemented in Japan require teacher education programs to place more emphasis on educational methods and techniques, learning processes of children, guidance, and other pedagogical concerns, even though this will limit the number of credits in subject specialization areas, especially for secondary teachers (Usui, 1998).

Educators in both places increasingly recognize that professional mentoring must accompany assessment and that mentoring needs to be a major part of induction year programs. It is also becoming more evident to educators in both countries that learning to teach well is a process which needs to include professional knowledge and practice along with disciplinary knowledge during the preservice years and continues as teachers work together in schools. There is a great deal that can be learned by sharing with each other our different experiences and insights as we address common concerns.

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